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**NOAA ANNOUNCES FUNDS FOR GULF OF MAINE COUNCIL
TO CONTINUE DAM REMOVAL, HABITAT RESTORATION**

Representatives from the state of Maine, the Gulf of Maine Council and NOAA announced today funding and plans for future dam removal throughout New England. The announcement was held at the site of a recently removed dam in Falmouth, Maine, where they also discussed the success of stream restoration projects in the region. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is a part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Tim Keeney, deputy assistant secretary for oceans and atmosphere, delivered the announcement of NOAA's \$386,000 grant to the Gulf of Maine Council for this year. It will fund dam removal, fish passage improvements, invasive species removal and restoration of water flow to tidally restricted saltmarsh environments.

Keeney outlined the importance of dam removal and habitat restoration to the region's fishery resources. The Smelt Hill dam was removed in 2002, opening seven miles of the Presumpscot River and restoring vital fish habitat.

"The Smelt Hill project is an excellent example of a project that has reaped both immediate and long-term benefits," Keeney said. "Removing dams that are no longer useful or are no longer economically cost-effective is invaluable in our efforts to restore fishery resources. This benefits the environment, the local economy and the overall quality of life throughout New England."

"The removal of the Smelt Hill Dam has improved water quality and aquatic habitat throughout the lower Presumpscot River. This is what stream restoration is all about," said Maine Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Dawn Gallagher.

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NOAA has awarded nearly \$2 million in grants through its Community-based Restoration Program since 2001 for dam removal. The additional amount is intended to continue efforts throughout Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

"The health of the ecological communities in the gulf depends on a healthy and robust watershed. Restoring natural flows, reopening access to spawning grounds, and enhancing riparian and estuarine wetlands breathes new life into near coastal areas," said Don Hudson, Gulf of Maine Council.

Forty-two habitat restoration projects have been funded since 2001. Many are undergoing assessments to determine the full effects since completion. The NOAA grants were matched or leveraged with nearly \$4 million in additional funding and in-kind support.

To learn more about the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, please visit: <http://gulfofmaine.org/>

The mission of the Gulf of Maine Council is to maintain and enhance environmental quality in the Gulf of Maine to allow for sustainable resource use by existing and future generations. The Council's Habitat Committee includes a Habitat Restoration subcommittee that meets on a regular basis and focuses on identifying and developing capacity for regionally important restoration projects.

The NOAA Restoration Center uses a community-based restoration program to work with organizations and governments to support locally driven habitat restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas. NOAA funds on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that offer educational and social benefits for citizens and their communities and provide long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. Since 1996, over 800 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners. For more information on the Community-based Restoration Program, please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.